



*Making Social Care
Better for People*

inspection report

FOSTERING SERVICE

Cornwall County Council Fostering Service

**The Adoption & Family Finding Unit
13 Treyew Road
Truro
Cornwall
TR1 2BY**

Lead Inspector
Chris Passmore

Announced Inspection
16th January 2006 09:30

The Commission for Social Care Inspection aims to:

- Put the people who use social care first
- Improve services and stamp out bad practice
- Be an expert voice on social care
- Practise what we preach in our own organisation

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This is a report of an inspection to assess whether services are meeting the needs of people who use them. The legal basis for conducting inspections is the Care Standards Act 2000 and the relevant National Minimum Standards for this establishment are those for *Fostering Services*. They can be found at www.dh.gov.uk or obtained from The Stationery Office (TSO) PO Box 29, St Crispins, Duke Street, Norwich, NR3 1GN. Tel: 0870 600 5522. Online ordering: www.tso.co.uk/bookshop

Every Child Matters, outlined the government's vision for children's services and formed the basis of the Children Act 2004. It provides a framework for inspection so that children's services should be judged on their contribution to the outcomes considered essential to wellbeing in childhood and later life. Those outcomes are:

- Being healthy
- Staying safe
- Enjoying and achieving
- Making a contribution; and
- Achieving economic wellbeing.

In response, the Commission for Social Care Inspection has re-ordered the national minimum standards for children's services under the five outcomes, for reporting purposes. A further section has been created under 'Management' to cover those issues that will potentially impact on all the outcomes above.

Copies of *Every Child Matters* and *The Children Act 2004* are available from The Stationery Office as above

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SERVICE INFORMATION

Name of service Cornwall County Council Fostering Service

Address The Adoption & Family Finding Unit
13 Treyew Road
Truro
Cornwall
TR1 2BY

Telephone number 01872 270251

Fax number 01872 260557

Email address

Provider Web address

Name of registered provider(s)/company (if applicable) Cornwall County Council

Name of registered manager (if applicable) Mr Colin Reed

Type of registration Local Auth Fostering Service

Category(ies) of registration, with number of places

SERVICE INFORMATION

Conditions of registration:

Date of last inspection 1st October 2004

Brief Description of the Service:

The Cornwall County Council Fostering Service is a Local Authority Fostering Service operated by the Director of the Children's Services Authority.

The service recruits, approves and supports Foster Carers and makes placements for children of all ages through a variety of placement types. These include long-term, short term; emergency and occasional respite care placements. Also included are Kinship care placements and placements for parent and child.

The Service has a Foster Panel that meets to carry out specific functions under the terms of the Fostering Service Regulations 2002.

In addition to making and monitoring its own placement arrangements the Service is also responsible for the monitoring of other placements made by Independent Foster Agencies within the area and checking Private Fostering arrangements.

SUMMARY

This is an overview of what the inspector found during the inspection.

This inspection took place over a period of two weeks between 16th and 27th January 2006. Prior to the inspection-fieldwork taking place the Fostering Service were asked to send CSCI questionnaires to all registered Foster Carers and all Fostered Children over the age of 8 years. There was between a 20% and 25% response to these groups. The inspection methodology required visits to each of the three district Fostering offices to check Foster Carers files and meet staff; visits to the Placement Team, Staffing Section, the Fostering Service Managers and a review of Children's files were carried out at County Hall. In addition there were evening meetings with the Cornwall Foster Network Committee and a group of Foster Carers from across the County. Visits were made to a random sample of five Foster Placements across the three districts and a full team meeting of the Fostering Service was attended together with a Foster Panel meeting. Most methodologies were worked by two CSCI inspectors and we would like to express our appreciation to all those who contributed to the inspection for their help and co-operation.

As a Local Authority Fostering Service its function is co-dependent on other sectors of the Authority and whilst this inspection focuses on the requirements on the Fostering Service it recognises there are areas of criticism that are essentially out of the direct management remit of the service but still need to be addressed in order to improve services for fostered children.

Overall Foster Carers reported satisfaction with the Fostering Service stating that there has been a marked improvement over the past twelve to eighteen months. A good working partnership has been developed between the Cornwall Foster Carers Network and the Fostering Service and member Carers stated they felt involved in the development of the service, their roles enhanced and valued.

The opportunity for training had increased and there were reports of quality joint training taking place with social work and fostering staff. Some foster carers reported having accessed more specific topical training through the efforts of the Training Co-ordinator. The timing of training opportunities, during the day or evening sessions, remained a source of contention but the Fostering Service were looking at ways of addressing this.

The Service had worked up a wide-ranging Joint Action Plan with the Foster Care Network for the development of the service following the last inspection in October 2004 and the full Children's Services Inspection by CSCI in January 2005. Many of the action points were being processed but one of the main criticisms of the service, coming from foster carers, was that the service took too long to achieve change and that time scales had proved unrealistic. The perception of some carers was that the workloads of Service Managers and the bureaucracy of the Authority are contributory factors and to an extent these were borne out through the inspection.

Communication across the Fostering Service was also subject to criticism and the inspection process showed evidence of this being the case. There were examples of Fostering Offices issuing letters without Central approval and resulting in contradictory messages. There were other examples of differing recording and reporting practices within the three divisional offices as well as differences in interpretation of policies by Fostering Staff and Children's Caseworkers. This was brought to light in one of the group meetings with Foster Carers and further through records checks in the various offices.

There have been developments implemented to improve relations between the different sectors of the Children's Services Authority and Foster Carers with joint training and local joint office meetings. These were seen as being positive moves towards improving mutual understanding.

As well as Fostering Service Social Workers, children have allocated Children's Social Workers who remain responsible for the casework management and formal Reviews of children fostered. Relationships between Foster Carers and Children's Social Workers varied greatly. Some carers stated they had excellent relationships with their children's social workers whilst others were less impressed. Children's responses to questionnaires also reflected a diversity of experience. A review of children's case records showed that relevant paperwork was not always up to date and supplied to Foster Carers or the Service.

Children's responses to questionnaires showed them to be well supported by their foster carers. They are encouraged to enjoy healthy lifestyles, both in terms of healthy eating and lifestyle experiences. They are given encouragement with their education and the Authority has an annual awards event to celebrate academic achievement. Their responses and our meetings demonstrated the importance of contact with friends and family but also demonstrated how easily these arrangements can be affected adversely through lack of clarity, failure of transport or lack of consultation with carers. Of particular note was a response from one young person who ably expressed the frustration and embarrassment felt by fostered children who were subjected to levels of bureaucracy before being allowed, or not, to spend occasional nights on a stop-over with friends. This young person specifically requested that the subject was included in this inspection. That request was acted on and showed that across the County foster carers were confused about what decisions they could make without first talking to children's social workers. There is a need to protect children from harm but there are also general guidelines that carers can follow. The issue has been discussed with the Fostering Service managers who have issued appropriate guidance to all concerned in the past. It does appear that a timely reminder is needed to try to ensure that policy and practice is clear and that everyone applies the same rules.

What the service does well:

- Works well to support Foster Carers
- Promotes children's health and education

- Has good recruitment and advisory services
- There is a robust Assessment procedure for all prospective Foster carers
- The Placement Team works hard to make positive matches
- The Foster Panel is well constituted and operates effectively

What has improved since the last inspection?

- The working partnership formed between the Foster Network Committee and the Service
- Joint training for Foster Carers, Foster Service Staff and Social Workers
- A revision of the Review of Foster Carers Approvals
- A new Foster Care Agreement document has been produced for implementation with the new Review process

What they could do better:

- Tighten up on time scales for completion of pieces of work started but not yet resolved
- Continue to monitor the time taken to deal with allegations and complaints and notification of outcomes
- Take steps to ensure a clarity of understanding in relation to children's occasional overnight stays with friends
- Ensure foster carers and the Service have up to date Care Plans and Placement Arrangements and Personal Education Plans
- Managers should make regular visits to district offices to monitor recording systems and frequency of supervisory visits
- Time scales between completion of the assessment process for new foster carers and notification of their approval should be kept as tight as possible
- Review the accommodation arrangements for fostering staff teams and the overall staffing of the service, given the levels of regular and developmental work and monitoring of Private Fostering

Please contact the provider for advice of actions taken in response to this inspection.

The report of this inspection is available from enquiries@csci.gsi.gov.uk or by contacting your local CSCI office.

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Being Healthy

The intended outcome for this Standard is:

- The fostering service promotes the health and development of children.(NMS 12)

The Commission considers Standard 12 the key standard to be inspected at least once during a 12 month period.

JUDGEMENT – we looked at the outcome for Standard:

12

The Fostering Service actively promotes the Health and Development of children in foster placements.

EVIDENCE:

- Fostering Service Records, Children's files and responses to questionnaires showed the Service promotes children's health and development across a range of areas
- Physical health and development is monitored through LAC Nurses, annual medicals (under 16) and routine registration and appointments with G.P. panels, dentists and opticians.
- LAC reviews monitor health care and there was evidence through these of specialist referrals. These included referrals to Child Psychological and Mental Health services. The Children's Services Authority now has an Intake Community Psychiatric Nurse service specifically for LAC children. Many children have experienced abuse in some form or another and there was evidence to show how they are supported through counselling and therapy using allied professional agencies.
- Healthy Eating is promoted by Foster carers and was a main feature in responses from Fostered children
- Healthy lifestyles were also evidenced in terms of responses to questions about activities and the Fostering Service's own survey on smoking within foster carers households
- Foster Carers are provided with training and advice on Health, Hygiene, First Aid and personal development through core training and the Fostering Handbook.

Staying Safe

The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

- Any persons carrying on or managing the service are suitable. (NMS 3)
- The fostering service provides suitable foster carers.(NMS 6)
- The service matches children to carers appropriately.(NMS 8)
- The fostering service protects each child or young person from abuse and neglect.(NMS 9)
- The people who work in or for the fostering service are suitable to work with children and young people.(NMS 15)
- Fostering panels are organised efficiently and effectively.(NMS 30)

The Commission considers Standards 3, 6, 8, 9, 15 and 30 the key standards to be inspected at least once during a 12 month period.

JUDGEMENT – we looked at outcomes for the following Standard(s):

3,6,8,9,15,30.

The Fostering Service is provided and managed by appropriate personnel. Recruitment procedures are sound and staff appointed to the service are suitably qualified and experienced. There were small lapses in recruitment procedure evidence relating to outstanding references and date recordings for CRB Disclosure renewals but these did not amount to serious shortfalls in safeguarding. Other arrangements for the protection of children from abuse are in place in terms of procedural arrangements, training and advice but also rely on detailed, accurate information from the children's caseworker. This was not always easily evidenced and in one particular case the lack of detail raised concerns over 'contact arrangements'. This was an example of how the performance of the Fostering Service can be affected by other operational partners within the Children's Services Authority.

EVIDENCE:

Standards 3 & 15

- A review of staff files provided evidence of the recruitment, short listing, interview and checking procedures
- The Authority has a policy of renewing all CRB checks on a three yearly basis in line with the 'Best Practice' advice in National Minimum Standards. Existing CRB disclosures were inspected as part of the review of files and these were satisfactory but showed up two transcription errors in terms of dates for the renewal process. These were made

known to the service managers. There were also examples of outstanding references for staff being transferred into the Fostering Service from other branches of the Children's Services

Standard 6.

- Foster Carers are subject to an intensive assessment and introduction to Fostering training programme before being presented to Panel for approval. Foster Carers often cited longer than acceptable delays between the assessment process and approval notifications and this was brought to the attention of the service managers.
- The Authority has decided to extend its policy of three yearly renewals of CRB Disclosures to Foster Carers and their households as well. This is commendable as it is over and above requirements in National Minimum Standards
- Those placements visited demonstrated the Fostering Service approves homes with suitable accommodation arrangements and there was evidence in files to support the fact that children only share a bedroom where it is by previous or expressed agreement. There were also examples of the Authority working with Foster Carers to enable extensions to property for the purposes of long-term fostering
- Foster Carers knew of the inspection duty on CSCI and a specific statement is now included in the new Foster Care Agreement

Standard 8.

- In recent years the Fostering Service has been much more pro-active in achieving suitable matching. This has come about as a result of internal quality reviews regarding multiple placements and the desire to limit the number of placement breakdowns
- All placement requests are screened through a central placements team who have built up database knowledge of approved carers. The placement team hold up to date details regarding placements available and those required and look for appropriate matches within these
- The placement team require all referrals to have been approved by a Care Manager before consideration and to be supported by the appropriate information regarding the child(ren) to be placed.(But see also NMS 9 below)
- There was evidence from the placement visits made of some children having pre-placement visits to proposed foster carers before placement takes place and this is ideal. However, there was also anecdotal evidence and responses to questionnaires that suggested this was not always the case, with children being taken and left with carers by social workers with very little time to spare
- Statistically the placement team was making an average of 11 placements per week in 2005

Standard 9.

- The review of Foster Carers files showed that the Fostering Service itself does not always have up to date information regarding the Placement Plans and Care Plans for children fostered. This is not necessarily a problem given that the Service is part of the Local Authority and that information is housed within another sector of the Authority. However, the geographical area covered by the Local Authority and its administrative division into six local offices makes it difficult for the Fostering Service to be able to easily gain access to children's files
- In one example there was no Placement Plan in relation to the current placement and therefore no clear safeguarding information in relation to 'contact arrangements' in the Child's file. This matter was followed through with the Children's Services caseworker and managers, and found not to represent any problem other than to highlight fundamental shortcomings in information sharing and transfer
- It was recommended that the Fostering Service reconsiders what information it requires as there is a case for keeping up to date copies of essential documentation on Carer's files both to enable Placement Supervisory workers to check that Foster placements are adhering to safeguarding arrangements
- The Service has procedures in place to protect children from abuse or neglect both from influences outside their placement and from within
- The Service has database records covering all abuse allegations and Standards of Care inquiries and Fostering Service managers and Child Protection advisors analyse these on an annual basis to identify any trends which may be an indicator for example to training needs
- All procedural guidelines are contained in the Foster Care Handbook.

Standard 30.

- The Fostering Service has a Fostering panel constituted in accord with Fostering Regulations 2002 and which operates in accordance with the guidelines of NMS 30
- The panel meets on the second and fourth Wednesday of each month
- The scope of business brought for the panel's attention was seen to be comprehensive and wide ranging. Panel members sought appropriate information from Officers of the Service before making their recommendations. Where possible Foster Carers are also encouraged to attend any panel meeting where their particular circumstances are being reviewed and to make their own representations.
- In discussion the panel-chair also outlined arrangements for the panel's quality assurance role and monitoring of the range and type of carers available in comparison to the needs of children referred for Fostering
- Since the last inspection there is now a handbook available to Panel members that contains appropriate procedural guidance.
- An information handout has also been prepared for prospective and established Foster Carers attending a Panel Meeting. This document outlines the role of the panel, its responsibilities and function, as well as

preparing the attendee for the way in which the panel conducts its business. There is a feedback sheet for all attendees to complete and return following their attendance at a panel meeting

- The Fostering Service also arranges training sessions for Panel members at regular intervals to assist the panel to keep abreast of developments and legislation.

Enjoying and Achieving

The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

- The fostering service values diversity.(NMS 7)
- The fostering service promotes educational achievement.(NMS 13)
- When foster care is provided as a short-term break for a child, the arrangements recognise that the parents remain the main carers for the child.(NMS 31)

The Commission considers Standards 7, 13, and 31 the key standards to be inspected at least once during a 12 month period.

JUDGEMENT – we looked at outcomes for the following standard(s):

7,13,31

The Fostering service is aware of its duty to value diversity and recognises and promotes the educational achievement of children placed in foster care.

EVIDENCE:

Standard 7.

- The fostering service is aware of its duty to value diversity and reflects this in terms of equal opportunities in policy and procedural matters, however, the requirements to provide placements recognising issues of ethnicity, language or culture have not yet become significant for the service
- The service has supported children with individual religious requests, such as for baptism, but has also been impeded in fulfilling such requests through lack of action on the part of caseworkers. This was ably demonstrated in a response to the children's questionnaire
- Foster Carers training incorporates general and specific areas of child development and there were examples in the children's files of preparations for adulthood and to gain experiences that are confidence and character building. The Fostering Service has recently included Fostered Children as part of an interview and selection process for staff
- Children with disabilities are given equal opportunities to maximise their potential and provided with access to specialised support and monitoring
- There was inconsistent interpretation of key policies across the County. One young person raised the issue of overnight stays with friends in their questionnaire response, particularly requesting inclusion of the subject in this inspection report. The letter demonstrated the frustration and

embarrassment felt by fostered children when their Foster Carers have to get permission from caseworkers for a foster child's stopover with friends. The subject was also raised with foster carers from across the County at a group meeting and their responses clearly confirmed differing understandings regarding this issue. LAC 12 (2004) lays out guidelines for caseworkers and the Fostering Service has clear guidance in the Carers Handbook. There is an obvious requirement to protect children but this can be done within the expectations of normal parenting. Yet there is confusion in the practice for LAC children, which needs to be addressed for the sake of enabling fostered children to enjoy a normal lifestyle wherever appropriate.

Standard 13.

- Children's educational achievement and progress is monitored and evaluated through the services of the Children's Services Authority
- The Fostering Service holds annual 'Celebration of Achievement' events and Foster Carers are encouraged to participate in the children's educational reviews and progress as normal parents would do
- A review of children's files showed that not all LAC children had an up to date Personal Education Plan and there were representations from Foster Carers regarding the intermittent failure of the voluntary drivers to take children to education. Whilst these last points are outside the responsibility of the service to arrange it does reflect adversely on the service.

Standard 31.

- Requests for Short-term breaks from the Fostering Service occur very infrequently and when they do it is clear that the parent retains the main responsibilities.
- There is a separate Short-Term Breaks scheme for children with disabilities within the Local Authority but this scheme is currently outside of the management remit of the Fostering Service and plans for its inclusion are still a long way from resolution
- CSCI have been in talks with the Children's Services Authority regarding the continued operation of this short-term break service without regulation but, to date, without resolution. Following this inspection the Commission will need to reflect on this matter and could move towards a more positive line of enforcement in order to bring this service into its correctly regulated settings.

Making a Positive Contribution

The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

- The fostering service promotes contact arrangements for the child or young person. (NMS 10)
- The fostering service promotes consultation.(NMS 11)

The Commission considers Standards 10 and 11 the key standards to be inspected at least once during a 12 month period.

JUDGEMENT – we looked at outcomes for the following standard(s):

10,11.

The Fostering Service promotes the importance of contact arrangements with Foster carers but the Service itself does not have overall control of factors to achieve the success of these arrangements. It is co-dependent on the Children's Caseworkers to maintain communication with the Service, Foster Carers and to arrange appropriate transport arrangements. Children in Foster Care are regular consulted as to their wishes and views.

EVIDENCE:

- There was evidence that positive contact arrangements were in place for the majority of those children who were case tracked. Evidence was found in records on Carers Files, in children's files and through discussion with Foster Carers and children.
- There were examples of Foster Carers working with the fostered child's natural family, whilst others had no dealings with the natural family.
- Responses to questionnaires also confirmed contact was an important issue but was also a source of aggravation through short-notice contacts being made by Children's Social workers or through arranged transport failing to turn up. The former issue made carers feel they were not valued. The latter issue was raised during one of the placement visits in relation to a failure of transport to take children for contact the previous weekend, and the resulting disappointment for the children involved.
- Records in children's files did not always have up to date care plans or placement arrangements covering contact and the majority of Foster Carers files contained no up to date placement arrangements, making it difficult for supervising workers to ensure that the placement arrangements were being carried out. The children's files contained copies of LAC Reviews and these addressed the issue of contact but

there was in the main no one defining document containing the current placement arrangements or plan.

- Questionnaire responses showed that children who are fostered are regularly consulted by their carers
- Children are given information on how to make representations or complaints and there was evidence in files where these systems have been used using an advocacy service
- The Fostering Service also holds an annual day-event that amongst other purposes serves to inform the service of children's views and opinions

Achieving Economic Wellbeing

The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

- The fostering service prepares young people for adulthood.(NMS 14)
- The fostering service pays carers an allowance and agreed expenses as specified.(NMS 29)

The Commission considers Standards 29 the key standard to be inspected at least once during a 12 month period.

JUDGEMENT – we looked at outcomes for the following standard(s):

29

The Fostering Service has a scheme of payments based on a banding system together with guidance on what additional allowances can be claimed. The level of payments is still seen by some carers as being too low and responses to questionnaires reflected this.

EVIDENCE:

- The irregularity of monthly payments has been a source of aggravation to Carers and the service provider alike. The payment of allowances has now been changed to a weekly basis and is seen by the majority of carers as a positive development
- The current system of banded payments based on the presenting difficulties of the child and other historic factors is being reviewed in favour of a system of payments based on carers-skills
- It is anticipated this will result in a more fair system of payments and aid the matching process. A revised scheme of payments in respect of Mother and child fostering has already been successfully introduced
- These reviews of payments have been and are being conducted in consultation with Foster Carers and in partnership with the Cornwall Foster Care Network Committee. They are still some way from conclusion and there will needs be a transition period
- One of the concerns of carers rests in the time it is taking to achieve these changes. There is a feeling that the process is one of fundamental importance and therefore needs the dedicated attention of a service manager rather than the service managers trying to complete this task as part of a much wider agenda of change. It was stated during a meeting that carers feel there should be an additional service manager

appointed in view of the changes to the service that are being introduced and the service's general workload.

Management

The intended outcomes for these Standards are:

- There is a clear statement of the aims and objectives of the fostering service and the fostering service ensures that they meet those aims and objectives.(NMS 1)
- The fostering service is managed by those with the appropriate skills and experience. (NMS 2)
- The fostering service is monitored and controlled as specified. (NMS 4)
- The fostering service is managed effectively and efficiently.(NMS 5)
- Staff are organised and managed effectively.(NMS 16)
- The fostering service has an adequate number of sufficiently experienced and qualified staff.(NMS 17)
- The fostering service is a fair and competent employer.(NMS 18)
- There is a good quality training programme. (NMS 19)
- All staff are properly accountable and supported.(NMS 20)
- The fostering service has a clear strategy for working with and supporting carers.(NMS 21)
- Foster carers are provided with supervision and support.(NMS 22)
- Foster carers are appropriately trained.(NMS 23)
- Case records for children are comprehensive.(NMS 24)
- The administrative records are maintained as required.(NMS 25)
- The premises used as offices by the fostering service are suitable for the purpose.(NMS 26)
- The fostering service is financially viable. (NMS 27)
- The fostering service has robust financial processes. (NMS 28)
- Local Authority fostering services recognise the contribution made by family and friends as carers.(NMS 32)

The Commission considers Standards 17, 21, and 24 the key standards to be inspected at least once during a 12 month period.

JUDGEMENT – we looked at outcomes for the following standard(s):

17, 21,24, 25, 26.

Management of the Fostering Service has improved since the last inspection though the task of managing three offices from the centre and geographical features of the County still leads to inconsistencies in service delivery.

There has been an overall increase in support staffing and carers reflected their appreciation of the quality and quantity of work of the Fostering Service staff. Workloads were generally high and staff shortages through sickness and secondments were evidenced. Staff in some offices were working under difficult physical conditions due to overcrowded accommodation and there were

shortfalls in the service's maintenance of administrative records. Inconsistencies in interpretation of policy and guidance to foster carers were also evidenced.

EVIDENCE:

Standard 17.

- Records showed that staffing had increased overall since the last inspection and there had been refinement of the divisional office organisation. Staff were appropriately qualified on appointment or were required to undertake qualifying training once appointed
- Records showed the majority of staff to be qualified as well as indicating those who are in the process of qualifying training
- In one office there was a shortfall in qualified staff able to undertake assessments of prospective foster carers due to the secondment of substantive post holders. The practice manager was hopeful that one of these secondments was to be short term and had made practical arrangements to manage the remaining workload but this was at the cost of areas of office management. (e.g. consistency of recording procedures and practice.)
- Across the County there was evidence that the service had not been meeting its targets on supervisory visiting and this could often be tracked back to periods of staff shortages at times of sickness
- Individual caseloads varied but were generally quite high and there was evidence to show the volume of work generated
- Foster Carers, whilst appreciating the hard work of the Fostering Support workers and their availability, also commented that they felt the service needed more staff. However, any increase in staffing would also have implications for the service accommodation

Standard 26.

- Office accommodation was appropriate in respect of security of record storage and accessibility however there were issues of overcrowding
- The Bodmin Team and Placement Team offices in particular were cramped. At times this overcrowding in team rooms led to staff working without a desk and made the Practice Manager's task of supervising individual staff very difficult. The ability of staff to hold reasonable telephone conversations with callers was difficult due to raised volume levels and confined space when more than one call was being dealt with. Interviewing carers, prospective carers or children and maintaining confidentiality were also issues in both of these offices
- The other two divisional offices had better overall accommodation arrangements, though not ideal.

Standards 21,24, 25.

- Fostering Service staff offer a good level of support and supervision to Foster Carers.
- Their roles fulfil those identified in NMS 21.2 and foster carers can contact them via the offices or directly on their mobiles. There is also an out of hours service available to Foster Carers
- There is now more emphasis on developing the fostering service staffs' supervisory role in relation to fostering placements and this is likely to become more focused as the new foster carers review procedures are actioned later in the year
- There was variation in practice and recording in relation to support/supervisory visits across the County
- Offices are not consistent in their use of the chronology sheets found in foster carers files. In most cases these have not had entries made in them for many months. These sheets should hold a brief reference to each contact, event or report and be cross-referenced to other detailed recording.
- This would obviate the requirement for Contact Sheets, which were present in some files but not in others.
- Home visit records have been recorded on Detailed Record sheets rather than Supervisory Visit Records, thus making it difficult to audit the frequency of visiting
- The actual definition of a supervisory visit has been lost in some cases where fostering staff have been accompanying children's Social Workers during their Review of Placement visits. These visits have been single child orientated rather than supervising the Foster Carers placement agreements themselves. Records of such visits have again become merged with general records, by being recorded on Detailed Record Sheets
- Most of the foster carer's files examined did not contain up to date placement agreements or care plans. When Children's files were checked these updated documents were often not found in them either. There was a reliance on LAC Review outcomes and agreements without updating the appropriate plans. Foster Carers files should contain an up to date Care Plan and Placement Arrangement Record for each child placed to enable Fostering Service staff to carry out their role. Until this is achieved the Fostering Service cannot meet its requirements under Schedule 6
- The Administrative Records for this Fostering Service relies heavily on other sections of the Local Authority, principally the Recruitment and Personnel sections and Children's Services Social Work staff. This has proven to be a difficult area to monitor and manage in the past both because of the availability of sufficient staff and the geographical distension of the County. The formation of a single Children's Services Authority is hoped to go some way to making improvements in communication between Children's social workers and the Fostering

Service. This process has already started with meetings between Foster Carers and staff with District Managers. Children's Social Workers contact numbers are now supplied to Foster Carers and there is a sense of a professional partnership forming between Foster Carers and Children's Services Staff.

- The Fostering Service has mechanisms in place to monitor Complaints and Allegations. There is an annual audit of these and the breakdown of findings for the year 2004 were seen and discussed during the inspection. A similar exercise is to be conducted soon in respect of 2005.
- A revised Complaints Procedure for Foster Carers had been produced in co-operation with representatives of the Fostering Network Committee and was to be distributed within the next two months
- There was not always a clear audit trail for tracking the conclusion of complaints and allegations or for advising those subject to such investigations of the outcomes. This was further borne out by Foster Carers comments regarding the amount of time it took to conclude complaints or allegations and from evidence found on Foster Carers files.
- Together with the new procedures for the Review of Foster Carers Approvals comes a revised Foster Care Agreement that will fulfil the requirements of Schedule 5. These were not in use at the time of the inspection but a final copy of the new agreement was available for the inspection.

SCORING OF OUTCOMES

This page summarises the assessment of the extent to which the National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services have been met and uses the following scale.

4 Standard Exceeded (Commendable) **3** Standard Met (No Shortfalls)
2 Standard Almost Met (Minor Shortfalls) **1** Standard Not Met (Major Shortfalls)

"X" in the standard met box denotes standard not assessed on this occasion
 "N/A" in the standard met box denotes standard not applicable

BEING HEALTHY	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
12	3

STAYING SAFE	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
3	3
6	3
8	3
9	2
15	3
30	3

ENJOYING AND ACHIEVING	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
7	2
13	3
31	X

MAKING A POSITIVE CONTRIBUTION	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
10	2
11	3

ACHIEVING ECONOMIC WELLBEING	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
14	X
29	2

MANAGEMENT	
<i>Standard No</i>	<i>Score</i>
1	X
2	X
4	X
5	X
16	X
17	3
18	X
19	X
20	X
21	2
22	X
23	X
24	2
25	2
26	2
27	X
28	X
32	X

Are there any outstanding requirements from the last inspection?

STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS

This section sets out the actions, which must be taken so that the registered person/s meets the Care Standards Act 2000, Fostering Services Regulations 2002 and the National Minimum Standards. The Registered Provider(s) must comply with the given timescales.

No.	Standard	Regulation	Requirement	Timescale for action
1	FS9	Reg34(3) & Sch.6.	The Fostering Service must ensure there are current Care Plans and Placement Arrangements in place for each child placed	30/09/06
2	FS6	Reg.28.(5)	New Foster Care Agreements must be prepared for each review of an approved Foster Carer	30/09/06

RECOMMENDATIONS

These recommendations relate to National Minimum Standards and are seen as good practice for the Registered Provider/s to consider carrying out.

No.	Refer to Standard	Good Practice Recommendations
1	FS13	Children's Files must contain up to date Personal Education Plans.
2	FS29	Restructuring of the payments to carers should be achieved as soon as is practicable and carers kept informed of progress throughout.
3	FS17	Keep under review the staffing requirements of the service giving particular regard to periods of sustained absence and other duties of the Service such as monitoring Private Fostering and Placements made by other Fostering

		Agencies.
4	FS22	Clarify the recording system that is to operate across the whole of the Service. Make regular audit visits to each office to monitor the consistency and quality of recording
5	FS24	Ensure Foster Carers files contain copies of up to date Care Plans and Placement Agreements for each child placed
6	FS26	Urgently review the accommodation provided for Fostering Service staff in the Bodmin Office and Placement Team in relation to NMS 26.4.

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